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**SPECIAL
REPORT**

By MICHAEL GINGOLD

HOMEMADE HORRORZINES



"The greater the oppression, the bigger the underground fan scene [that comes out against it]."

uct. Many of these, like Jim Morton's *Trashola*, folded after a few years; among the survivors is my own *Scareaphania*, a monthly collection of theatrical and video horror reviews. If you've ever wanted to know what one of the Fango/GZ crew really thinks about the latest genre output, here's a chance to find out.

As the decade went on and video subsumed the horror market, it changed the way many fans saw genre films, and new publications sprang up devoted to terror on cassette. "Being located in Indianapolis, I don't get the chance to see theatrical screenings," says Rod Sims of *The*

If there's any doubt about the level of devotion that the horror genre inspires, all one has to do is look at the number of genre-oriented publications its fans produce. Fanzines, amateur newsletters and magazines born from typewriters and home computers, have embraced the horror genre like no other; only science fiction commands the same interest among fan editors. There are currently over 50 titles available by

subscription—or, in some cases, in specialty shops—originating from all over the world.

The recent explosion of activity in the horror fanzine field began in the early '80s, spearheaded by Bill Landis' *Sleazoid Express*, the first zine to devote itself to the emerging trend of down-and-dirty horror. It was followed by a string of "review-zines," newsletter-sized publications devoted to coverage of current genre prod-

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**EUROPEAN
TRASH CINEMA**



Gorefest. "I try to do the best I can with the materials I can get my hands on." Thomas Deja, the editor of *Sticky Carpet Digest*, believes that covering tape releases is especially important today. "Video is becoming the primary domain of the horror and SF genres," he explains. "It's easy to get suckered into a lousy tape because of flashing lights, good graphics or just an effective hard sell."

Other fan-ed, dissatisfied with a horror cassette scene glutted by unimaginative sequels and direct-to-video schlock, began to broaden the scope of the films they covered. "You can never tell what kind of cinematic swill will get roasted in our pages, or what type of gutter classic will emerge," says Steve Puchalski, whose highly-regarded newsletter *SlimeTime* recently made the transition to the full-sized magazine *Shock Cinema*. Says Brian Johnson of *They Won't Stay Dead*, "I try to keep an open mind about the entire spectrum of 'psychotronic' movies. I've even branched out to include music, true



Freddy, Jason, etc." *Stink*, whose editor goes by the name Nick the Yak, also gives preference to movies whose makers may not have a great deal of money to throw around.

The independent nature of fanzines allows their editors to be as explicit, blatant and downright gross as they want.

stories and other odds and ends that keep the spirit alive."

Chris Poggiali, of *Temple of Schlock*, concurs. "We examine anything that's categorized as 'schlock'—cheap SF, spaghetti Westerns, kung fu movies, etc. Any one issue might go from *The Flying Guillotine* to *Bad Dreams* to *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* to *Revenge of the Cheerleaders*." Agrees Steve Fontone of *Killbaby*, recently rechristened *Tame*, "Our format is wildly flexible. We like to drag in whatever pop subculture detritus happens along in time for each issue. Obviously," he adds, "our new name is meant to be ironic."

Whether they specialize in horror or not, almost all fan-ed champion independent films as opposed to mainstream product. Says Arpad Jasko Jr. of his *City Morgue*, "The purpose of our zine is to salute low-budget and underground films and filmmakers who don't get their fair share in mainstream magazines. People should realize that there are alternatives to worthless junk like

"*Stink* gives more credit to the ideas behind the film, rather than its technical quality," Nick maintains. Charles Kilgore, who edits *ECCO* with Dom Salemi, shares the same view: "A big budget is not commensurate with cinematic value; indeed, we favor filmmakers whose unique vision precludes them from the Hollywood mainstream."

ECCO is just one of a whole crop of fanzines that go beyond the

largely review format to devote themselves to articles, filmographies and retrospectives. A good example is *Wet Paint*, which editor Jeff Smith began as *Cygnus* way back in the early '80s and features a balance between old and new faces and films. Others, like Dan Taylor's *Exploitation Retrospect*, began as review-zines but ultimately expanded. "ER began as a typical horror/exploitation/gore newsletter back in 1986, but has changed a lot in the space of four years," he explains. "Now, the issues deal with larger-scope subjects." One recent issue, for example, was devoted to Klaus Kinski.

Taking a somewhat narrower focus, Tim Paxton, editor (with David Todarello) of the more traditional horror zine *Naked! Screaming! Terror!*, also puts out a biweekly newsletter called *Monster*, which "explores the purest form of horror film, the subgenre which no doubt influenced us all—the monster movie! No slashers allowed!" *Dracula*, once a comics-oriented magazine spotlighting the title character, now devotes itself to "articles you just don't find in other horror publications, including 'making of' articles on low- and no-budget horror films and videos," according to editor Hugh Gallagher, while Cecil Doyle's *Subhuman*, says its creator, "examines eccentric film and video 'culture' with an emphasis on scumfilm appreciation."

Then there's Richard Klemensen's *Little Shoppe of Horrors*, which for over

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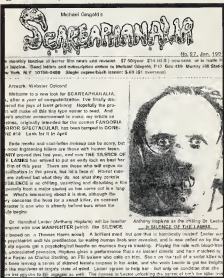
a decade has been devoted to coverage of Hammer films. After an absence of a few years, *LSOH* recently reappeared in an enormous, 170-page package that may be one of the largest single fanzines ever produced. Klemensen explains his love for the studio's output, "Hammer films stopped being scary long ago, but they remain what they always were—adult fairy tales, Gothic thrillers like no other company—including Universal—ever did. The Gothic ethos is European, and no one did them quite like Hammer."

In addition to the freedom of subjects to cover, the independent nature of fanzines allows their editors to be as explicit, blatant and downright gross as they want. *Psycho Video's* Gary Lesley makes no bones about what he looks for in a horror cassette: "We demand explicit, gratuitous nudity, turd-twisting shocks, de-



tailed mutilations and mind-blowing ultraviolence. These are a few of our favorite things. But if it appears we don't like good acting, direction, production values and interesting characters, you're dead wrong," he notes. Naturally, in the course of covering all this carnage, the issue of censorship pops into many a fanzine, and none have a stronger view on the subject than *Festering Brainsore's* David R. Williams. "FBS would like to [perform an obscene act upon] Jesse Helms," he puts it bluntly. "Censorship is evil, and wrong. Parents refuse to take responsibility for the actions of their children, and thus we have movements blaming society's ills on movies, tele-

vision, magazines and music. *FBS* is anti-censorship, anti-religion, and anti-stupid people." Though he similarly condemns cultural repression, Bart Oosterhoorn of the Dutch fanzine *GoreHound* finds that it has helped spur a growth in the ranks of fan-ed. "Horror fans are bound together by their love of the strange



and, often, forbidden," he opines. "The greater the oppression, the bigger the underground fan scene [that comes out against it]."

Bringing up a foreign publication leads us to another issue that came to the fore recently in the fanzine world. In 1988, Craig Ledbetter, who had been covering mostly homegrown video schlock in

FANZINE DIRECTORY

AUTHORS NOTE: *There are many more zines on the market than just those that are covered here; a good source for further titles is Mike Gunderloy's Factsheet Five, which lists hundreds of fanzines on all manner of subjects. Write to 6 Arizona Avenue, Rensselaer, NY 12144-4502. Almost all of the zines below will trade subscriptions for others.*

Autopsy: Chris Doolan, 89 Pangeza Street, Stafford Heights, Brisbane, Qland 4053, Australia

Blood Times: Louis Paul, 44 East 5th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11218

City Morgue: Arpad Jasko Jr., 876 Hayes Street, Holland, MI 49424

Creeping Unknown: Nick Cairns, 33 Maltby Road, Mansfield, Notts. NG18 3BN, England

Crimson Red: John Florendo, 162-10 78th Road, Fresh Meadows, NY 11366

Draculina: Hugh Gallagher, PO Box 115,
Moro, IL 62067

ECCO: Charles Kilgore, PO Box 65742,
Washington, DC 20035

European "Trash" Cinema: Craig Ledbetter, Box 5367, Kingwood, TX 77325

Exploitation Retrospect: Dan Taylor, PO
Box 1155, Haddonfield, NJ 08033-0708

Fatal Visions: Michael Helms, PO Box 133,
Northcote 3070, Victoria, Australia

Festering Brainsore: David R. Williams, 249
Tremont Street, N. Tonawanda, NY 14120

The Gorefest: Rod Sims, 10026 Hawkins Court, Indianapolis, IN 46229

GoreHound: Bart Oosterhoorn, 2e Weteringdwarstraat 60, 1017 SX Amsterdam, Holland

Imaginator: Ken Miller, Unit 1, Hawk House, Peregrine Park, Gomm Road, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP13 7DL, England

Killer Kung-Fu Enema Nurses on Crack:
Peter Hassall, PO Box 27432, Upper Willis
Street, Wellington, New Zealand

Little Shoppe of Horrors: Richard Klemensen, PO Box 3107, Des Moines, IA 50316

Mondo Gore: Hank Hankerson, GPO Box 9757, Brisbane 4111, Australia

Monster and Naked! Screaming! Terror!:
Tim Paxton, MPO Box 67, Oberlin, OH

Psycho Video: Gary Lesley, PO Box 7333.

Samhain: John Gullidge, 19 Elm Grove

Road, Topsham, Exeter, Devon EX3 0EQ,
England

Scareaphanalia: Michael Gingold, PO Box 489, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10155.

Shock Cinema: Steve Puchalski, 309 5th

Skinned Alive: Rod Williams, 35 Caribbean

Sticky Carpet Digest: Thomas Deja, 38-27

Stink: Nick the Yak, 27 Hillcrest Street,

Subhuman: Cecil Doyle, PO Box 53735,

Time: Steve Fentone, PO Box 742, Station

Q, Toronto, Ontario M4T 2N5, Canada
Temple of Schlock: Chris Poggiali, 225

They Won't Stay Dead!: Brian Johnson, 11

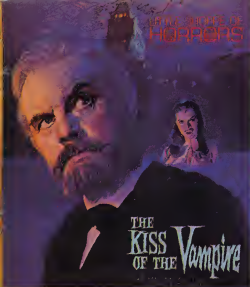
Werner Road, Greenville, PA 16125
Trash City: Jim McLennan, 247 Underhill

Video Watchdog: PO Box 5283, Cincinnati

Wet Paint: Jeff Smith, 2106 Tradewind

World of Fandom: Allen Shevy, PO Box

9421, Tampa, FL 33604



his *Hi-Tech Terror* fanzine, came out with an angry editorial blasting both the American genre film scene and the state of U.S. fanzines. Both European films and the foreign zines that covered them, he maintained, far outshined the FX-fixated domestic movies and many of the Stateside publications.

The piece helped touch off a controversy among fan-ed, and Ledbetter himself changed the focus of his own zine, rechristening it *European "Trash" Cinema* and devoting it solely to overseas films. He recently made the switch from newsletter format to a digest-sized magazine, featuring "not just horror and SF but also Westerns, war movies, spy flicks—you name it!" Louis Paul and Heidi Stock's *Blood Times* is another fanzine that, after a short time, narrowed its interest down to largely foreign product. "We highlight more European films and

directors than other zines," Paul says. "We cover Jess Franco films each issue and Mexican horror films every fourth issue." Paul has also begun *Blood Times* Video to help collectors get their hands on the rarer titles.

The qualitative superiority of foreign over U.S. films is still being debated, but there's no doubt that other countries have produced fanzines that definitely give their American counterparts a run for their money. Most are English-language publications hailing from England and Australia, and there are more now than ever before. "When we started out, you could count the number of UK zines on one hand," says John Gullidge of the British *Samhain*. "There are now 30 or so

"It's easy to get suckered into a lousy [video] because of flashing lights, good graphics or an effective hard sell."
—Thomas Deja, editor, *Sticky Carpet Digest*

publishing, a very healthy scene." *Samhain* has also grown over the years, and now boasts color covers and professional typesetting. Despite the pro look, however, Gullidge insists that "we have stuck forcefully to our roots. Two of the most popular parts of *Sam* are the Zine Zone [a directory of other fanzines] and Collector's Corner [reader ads]."

A large majority of foreign



fanzines are full- or digest-sized magazines, and their editors emphasize the humorous aspects. "Watch out for our off-center sense of humor," advises Nick Cairns of *Creeping Unknown*. "We aim to be different from other zines. One recent issue had an interview with Carl McCoy, who played the nomad in *Hardware*, Cath—a regular contributor—listing the continuity faults in *The Guardian*; and Lino—another regular contributor and a very weird person—telling us why he hates buses." Jim McLennan, whose *Trash City* covers all manner of unusual media, concurs that "a sense of humor is essential and a sense of the bizarre will help" to appreciate his zine. "Nothing is sacred in *TC*; we treat the serious things trivially, and the trivial things...well, just as trivially!" Some of the zines' titles veer far into the outrageous as well, though the monicker *Killer Kung-Fu Enema Nurses on Crack* is actually more bizarre than much of what New Zealander Peter Hassall covers inside.

Like their American counterparts, many of the foreign fanzines broaden their topics beyond horror. "What makes *Imaginator* a little different from other genre magazines," says its editor Ken Miller, "is that along with horror and SF films, it also deals with tough action movies such as Hong Kong gangster pictures and kung fu flicks." Some even go beyond the medium to cover other kinds of pop culture. Chris Doolan's *Autopsy* gives equal time to music; and

(continued on page 63)



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(continued from page 57)

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he explains, "Splatter movies and heavy metal are both largely neglected and/or dismissed by the mainstream press." And Rod Williams' *Skinned Alive* devotes most of its space to horror in print. "In Australia, the average paperback novel costs \$10 and hardbacks are usually around \$26. That's a lot of bloody money to spend on a book that may turn out to be a tedious drag, so with *Skinned Alive*, readers can perhaps save money." Williams does, however, encourage horror film fans to give fiction a try. "Who knows, maybe you will find something like Joe R. Lansdale's *The Drive-In* that will make the last horror movie you saw look like a blank screen in comparison."

Whatever the subject and country of origin, the one thing that binds all fan-ed's together is their love for the genre; says Gullidge, "*Samhain* started as my attempt to put back something into the genre that had given me so much pleasure during my teens." Other fan-ed's appreciate the opportunity to connect with others who share that interest. "Why do I do it? The weird mail I get," says Hassall, while Lesley states that "Money is always lacking in this hobby, but this is negated by the reassuring knowledge that many others think as you do." And then there are those who hope to develop and showcase their writing, like John Florendo, whose *Crimson Red* combines reviews with original fiction. "I felt that I could do better than some of the zines currently available, and I always wanted my work to be exposed, so..."

If there's one thing that doesn't inspire most fanzines, it's profit motive; very few fan-ed's make money off their publications. Australian Hank Hankerson even sends out his *Mondo Gore* for free; "What the hell, it's a magazine for tightwads," he says. These publications are kept afloat not by cash, but by devotion, the desire to share one's opinions and the pride in one's work that makes it well worth the problems that can crop up. "You may scream and yell while putting your zine together," says *World of Fandom's* Allen Shevy, "but when it's done, you remember why you work so hard at it."

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